

**New Directions:**

**2. Christ Leads Us in New Directions**

Luke 4:14-21

Christ came to change things. He came to call us to do new things.

Newness is exciting. One of the reasons that people have New Year's celebrations is because a new year brings new possibilities. And that is exciting. This year we will do some things we've never done before. And we will do some things differently than we've ever done them before.

We believe that the new things and the new ways will be better than the old things and the old ways. And most of the time that's true. Sometimes the new isn't as good as the old. I understand that some audiophiles, people who are connoisseurs of recorded music, are going back to vinyl records and record players, because the music sounds warmer to them than the digital recordings. That's fine. It may be a little harder for them to find vinyl records and record players. And listening to your music on a record player while you are jogging may be a problem. But where there's a will there's a way.

But most of us would agree our lives have been made better in many ways by new things. So, we get excited when something new comes along.

Last week we talked about Jesus doing something new. When he was baptized his life moved in a new direction. He left behind his life as a carpenter and began the work he came to do.

The question is, what was the work he came to do? Jesus struggled with that question. The 40 days of temptation in the wilderness was the time when Jesus struggled with that question. How was he to use his power and authority as the Son of God? He could use it to turn stones into bread to feed himself and everyone else. He could use his power to rule the world and force people to live right. He could use his power to perform miracles to win people's admiration and adoration. But Jesus recognized that all that would be a misuse of his power and authority. All three of the temptations Jesus faced had one thing in common: they were temptations to win people to himself by his use of his power and authority. Worship of power and authority was the very thing Jesus came to overcome. Worship of power and authority is satanic and is the source of the greatest suffering in the world, as people fight among themselves for power and authority.

Jesus left the wilderness with a clear understanding of what he was sent to do. He was sent to win people through love and service, not power and authority.

At Nazareth Jesus made a public proclamation of what he came to do. Jesus went into the synagogue he grew up in to announce that he was doing something new. He read the passage from Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to

set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Then he sat down in front of them in the teacher’s chair and said, “Today, in your hearing, this Scripture has been fulfilled.”

Now, this was something new. For Jesus to say that he personally was the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy was something new. He was saying that not only had his life moved in a new direction, but he was moving the world in a new direction. A new day had come. God was doing something new. Since the fall of Adam, Satan had ruled the world and evil oppressed humanity. People thought their misery was their punishment from God for their sins. They thought they should patiently and reverently endure it. But Christ was saying he had been sent to free people from the evils which steal the joy of life from us. Jesus was declaring that his ministry was the beginning of this new work of God. His mission and the mission of all who follow him is to oppose evil and free people to live joyful and complete lives.

That’s exciting. Up to that time, people did not expect life to get better. They expected their lives to be about the same as their parents and their grandparents. As Ecclesiastes says, “There’s nothing new under the sun.” Jesus declared there is something new under the sun. Something new was happening. From that point on life would get better and better as God inspired people to do new things in the name of Christ.

And life has gotten better over the past 2,000 years. As Christian disciples we have worked to make life better. That means we have worked for change, because things cannot get better without making changes. If you keep doing the same things in the same ways, you cannot expect things to get better. You’ve got to be willing to move in new directions.

Christ came to begin this age of newness, as God does new things to free people from old evils. As Christians, we have been called and empowered to continue to do new things in the name of Christ.

Isn’t that exciting?

We’ve seen many exciting new things during our lifetime. In the field of medicine look at the wonderful new things they are doing. I went to visit a member who was having surgery recently. I believe it was gall bladder, which at one time was a serious surgery, with days in the hospital and weeks of recovery. I was shocked to find her in day surgery. She was having orthoscopic surgery and would be going home that night.

I had an eye exam the other day. The doctor said that for a man my age I’ve got pretty good vision. He did say that I have a baby cataract in my left eye. When I was a boy, to be told you have a cataract was terrible news. Cataracts meant eventual blindness. Then in the early ‘70’s something new happened. The doctors began removing cataracts. I remember two of my members having those first cataract surgeries. They had to lie with sand bags around their heads for several days, so their heads wouldn’t move until the surgery healed. Even with all that, the surgery didn’t work for one of them. The surgery blinded him. Now it’s easier to get a cataract removed than getting your teeth cleaned. We don’t have to worry about cataracts blinding us anymore.

Look at the exciting new things happening in worship. Using computers and projectors in the service—how great is that? Being able to videotape the service to take to our shut-ins, isn't that wonderful? What about having personal receivers for the hearing impaired? When I was a boy, the hearing impaired had three choices: they could sit in the back of the church and guess at what was being said. They could move to the front and hear part of what was being said. (Incidentally, they almost never move to the front. I don't know why that is.) Or in the most progressive churches they could move to the places that had handheld, hardwired earphones. The hard of hearing had to sit there in those places and hold these monstrous things over their ears to hear. Of course, no one used them, because they were too embarrassed to use them. Now, we have these little transistor radios. You can sit wherever you want in the church. And you have this little earpiece, which is almost unnoticeable. Of course, they are still too embarrassed to use them. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

Not all change is good, of course. Personally, I don't like change for change's sake. I am a traditionalist. People ask me why we use the Apostle's Creed. Well, Christians have been using the Apostle's Creed since the second century. When we say the Apostle's Creed, I feel a connection to all those Christians who have been reciting it for centuries. I like tradition.

I am a traditionalist. I still root for baseball teams in the National League, because, to me, the American League and its teams are Johnny-come-lately upstarts. The American League didn't become a major league until 1901, 25 years after the National League was formed. And don't even get me started on expansion teams.

Change is good only if it makes life better for people. I love tradition. But when we have to make a choice between tradition and new ways which make life better for people, as servants of Christ, we have to choose to change directions. We must take every opportunity to make changes that make life better for people. And we ought to be excited about those changes.

Christ came to change things, to make life better for people. As followers of Christ, we are called to continue making changes for the better. There is nothing that we do that cannot be done better. We must constantly be looking for better ways of doing things. And when we find them, we must be willing to move in new directions.

Last week I talked about how God may be calling you in a new direction in this new year. I challenged you to prayerfully consider whether God is leading you to change directions. This morning I want to ask the same question in a slightly different way: Is God calling you to do something new to make life better for people? If so, say yes for Christ's sake.

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